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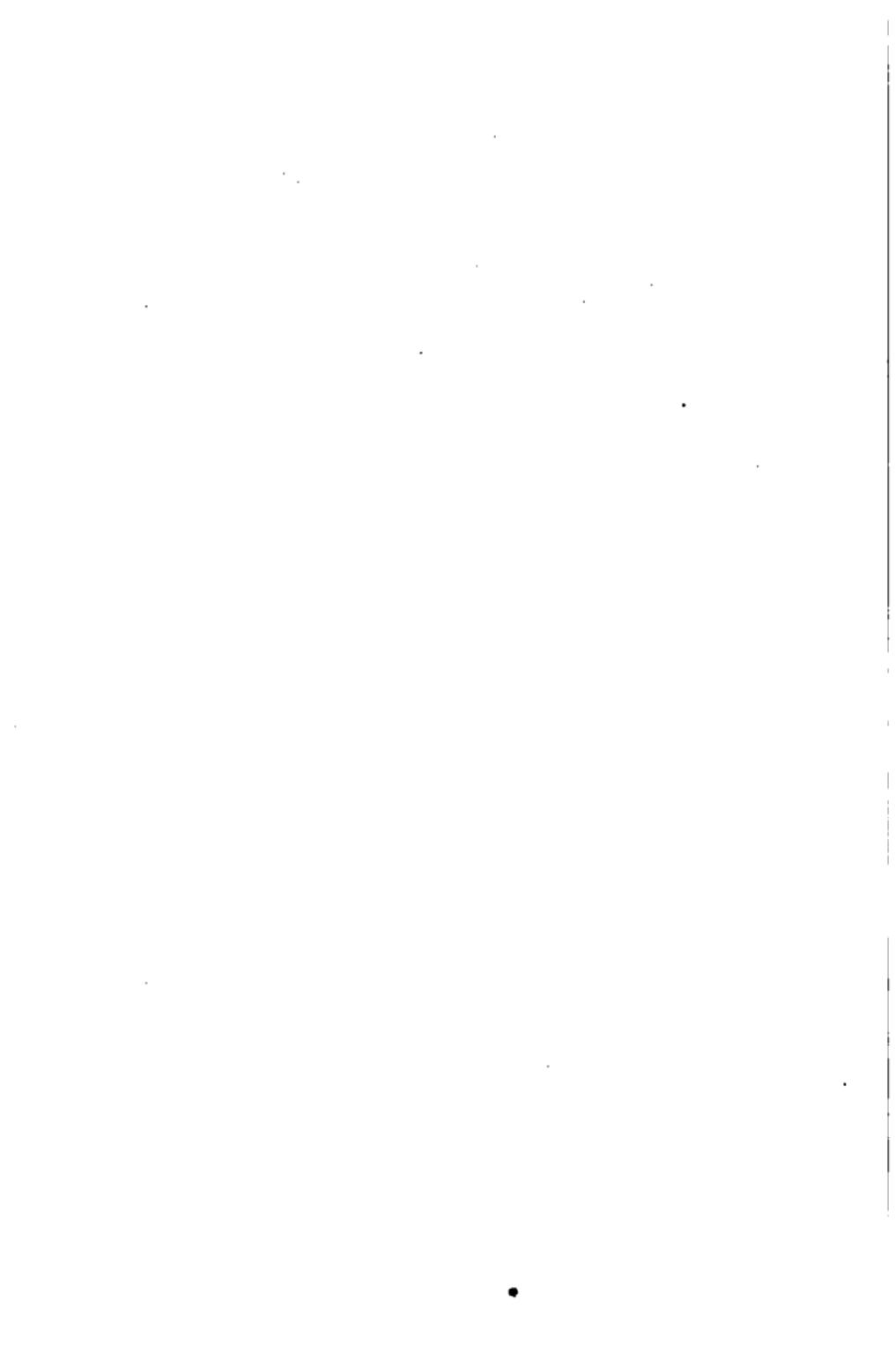
MATTIE

AND THE PEARL.





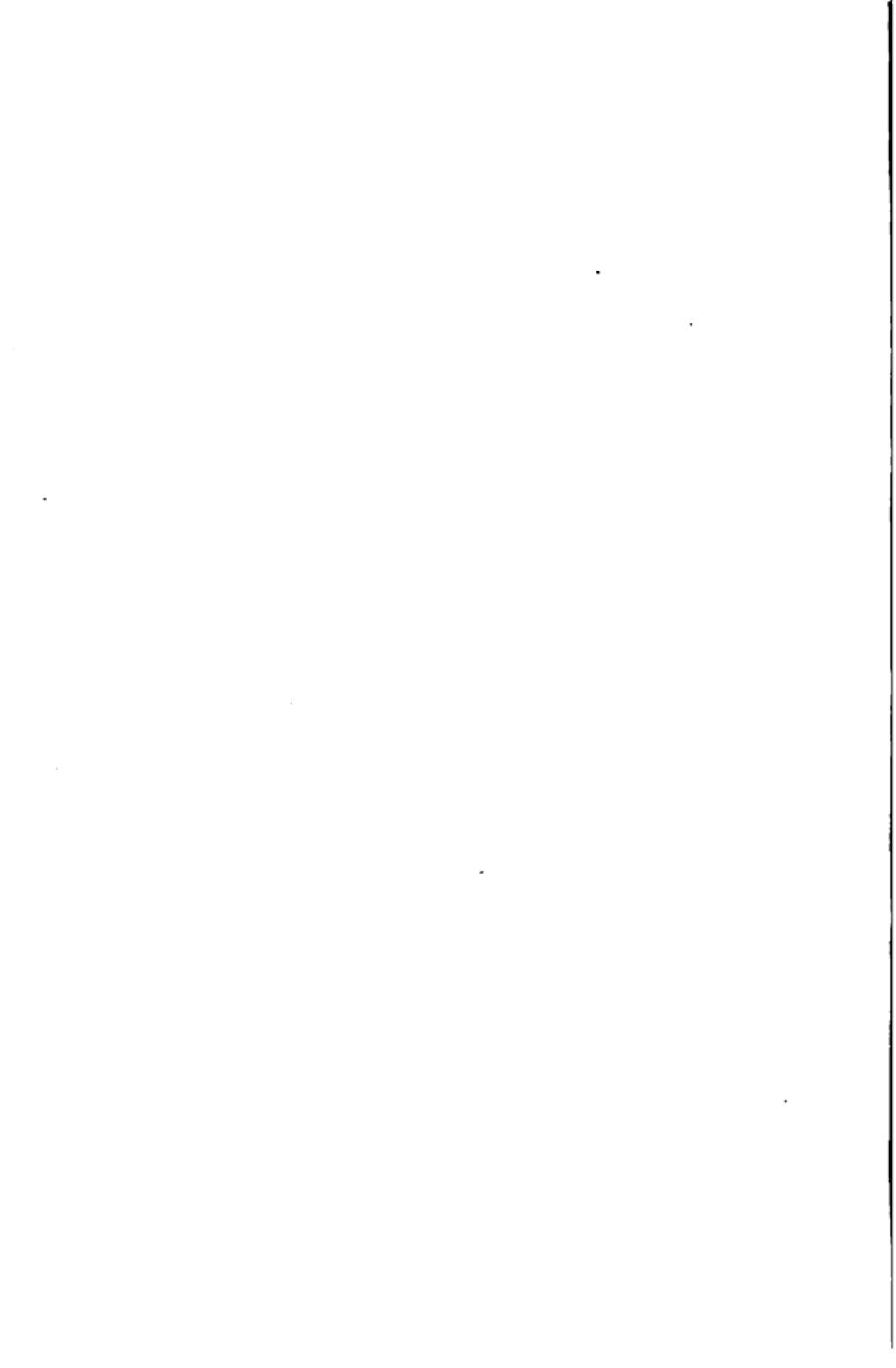






MATTIE AND THE "PEARL."









MATTIE'S INTRODUCTION TO HER COUSINS.

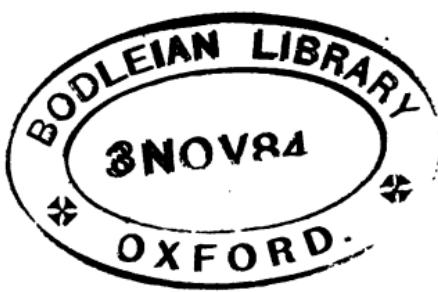
Page 15.

MATTIE AND THE PEARL.



Page 3.

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MATTIE AND THE "PEARL."



Page 23.

RUTH HAMILTON and Mattie Wilson sat looking out over the sea on a bench under an oak tree at Sea Field. Their arms were round each other's waist, as is not unfrequently the fashion with girls of twelve years of age. Ruth was the daughter of the rector of Buckering, and was spending the day at Sea Field with her friend and neighbour Mattie.

"Here is mother!" cried Mattie, as a lady, knit-

ting in hand, advanced towards them. "I am sure she is going to ask you now."

"Ruth, my dear, I hope your father will allow you to come over very often to spend a day with my poor Mattie while I am away. She will be quite a lonely little maiden here at Sea Field, in the long evenings after her daily governess has gone," said Mrs. Wilson, as she took her seat beside the girls.

Ruth was apparently quite prepared for the question. "Thank you, Mrs. Wilson," she said unaffectedly. "I am sure he will; papa likes me to be with Mattie whenever I can."

Mrs. Wilson looked pleased. It made her glad to think that Mattie was appreciated and loved by so good a little girl as every one knew Ruth Hamilton to be. "Mattie will never learn any harm from Ruth," she thought, as she looked into the clear brown eyes of the rector's daughter.

"May we tell Ruth about the boat, mamma?" asked Mattie; and then, afraid she had been indiscreet, she blushed till a brilliant scarlet suffused her round cheeks.

"Well, I think Ruth may be intrusted with that secret," said Mrs. Wilson with a laugh. "The fact is, Ruth, we want to have a great surprise for Jem when he comes home at midsummer. You

know his birthday comes in July, and we have had a little punt made for him, in which he can row himself about or go fishing, and perhaps take you and Mattie sometimes."

"She is painted as white as snow, and is called the *Pearl!*" interrupted Mattie with enthusiasm.

"How lovely!" cried Ruth. "How delightful! May I see her?"

"May she, mother?" asked Mattie.

"To be sure she may, my dear; but only through the gate."

The *Pearl* was safely locked up in the pretty boat-house that stood at the foot of Mr. Wilson's lawn. And thither the little party repaired to inspect her.

"What a beauty!" cried Ruth.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Wilson. "And do you know, I am so afraid of any one meddling with her, or allowing her to get rubbed or soiled before Jem sees her, that I have told Mattie she must keep the key of the boat-house herself, locked up in her work-box, all the six weeks that Mr. Wilson and I must be absent from home."

"It will be like Bluebeard's chamber," laughed Ruth.

"Truly I hope not," answered Mrs. Wilson with a smile. "But I can tell you Mattie will be a

very important person now. She will have all the keys of the house to take care of, as well as the boat-house key. And she must order the dinners, pay the visits, and receive the visitors."

Mattie laughed; but she liked the description very well. She thought it would be far from disagreeable to act the part of being "almost grown up" for a few weeks.

"Ruth," she said a few moments afterwards, as the two girls by themselves strolled down the carriage drive to the gate, "do you know there are strangers coming to the place? They are to stop in Mrs. Fosberry's lodgings in the village; and mamma says I must take her cards and call on them, as they are relations of ours."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ruth, "that must be Sir Henry Lawson and his two daughters that I heard papa speak of. They are very grand people, I believe. Are they really relations of yours, Mattie?"

"Yes," said Mattie with an air of solemnity. "Mamma says they are cousins, so of course I must go to see them at once."

"Are they immensely rich?" asked Ruth with simplicity.

"Immensely!" answered Mattie, making a very bad guess, but determined not to let Ruth think she was ignorant of any particular concerning these

important relatives. "Mamma says Sir Henry is a great invalid, quite paralyzed, and has come to Buckering for sea-air, with his daughters. Their mother is dead."

"Poor things!" said Ruth impulsively, whose own mother was dead too. "Will you call them by their Christian names?"

"I suppose so," answered Mattie vaguely, feeling more than doubtful on the subject.

At the gate they met old Mr. Hamilton, the rector, coming to call for his daughter. Before he could find time for a word of greeting to Mattie, Ruth cried out,—

"Father! only fancy, Mattie says she knows all about the Lawsons, and she is going to call upon them with visiting-cards all by herself."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mr. Hamilton, with a look of mock amazement. "I know something about them too," he added, dryly. "We may expect to see them in church next Sunday."

"They are Mattie's cousins," said Ruth impressively.

"You don't say so!" again repeated Mr. Hamilton, with the same gesture of amazement, which Mattie, somehow, felt to be a little provoking.

A good deal of interest was felt by the little sea-side congregation of Buckering when the Sunday came in which Sir Henry Lawson and his daughters

were expected to make their first appearance in church.

As people passed up the aisle, and took their places, many a curious glance was cast into the seat usually occupied by Mrs. Fosberry's lodgers.

Mattie's seat was opposite, so that, did she choose to do so, she could have stared the whole time, instead of attending to the service, in which she was supposed to be engaged. It must be confessed one stare did not satisfy her. She must look, and look again, in every pause between hymns, lessons, or prayers, in which she could find a chance.

Here is what she saw: an old gentleman, gray-headed and very stout, seated in one corner, propped up by a pillow, and with a pair of crutches beside him; two girls, that Mattie guessed might be between fifteen and sixteen, sitting opposite to him. Mattie could not well see their faces; but their clothes!—yes, their clothes! In these lay the temptation that caused Mattie's eyes so often to wander.

Such lovely pink-lined hats! such long white ostrich feathers! such gloves!—a delicate cream colour. And Mattie looked down with a sigh on her own fingers encased in sober brown, in which the marks of sundry mendings could be seen.

One of the Misses Lawson, too, had a fan. It

was fastened by a ribbon to her waist ; and she fanned herself, and whispered to her sister, nearly all through the service.

In all her little "country-mouse" life, Mattie had never seen either such dresses or such behaviour in church. Her attention was quite riveted.

By some pantomimic gestures she endeavoured to make Ruth share in her observations. But Ruth would not look. She had left her usual place, and sat with her back to the Misses Lawson.

Various were the comments made on these new arrivals, as the little assembly came out of church and dispersed to their respective homes. And very much to Mattie's pride and gratification, she was applied to by several of her humbler neighbours for information respecting them.

Meantime the objects of so much attention swept out of the church at a very slow pace to suit Sir Henry's infirmities.

The girls held up their dainty silk skirts while, Sir Henry leaning painfully on his crutches, they moved slowly towards Mrs. Fosberry's lodgings, which were situated at no great distance from the church.

"Did you ever see such beautiful hats?" cried Mattie to Ruth, as they walked on together. "I could not take my eyes off them."

"So I perceived," answered Ruth with a laugh.

Here they were overtaken by Mr. Hamilton. "Well, Mattie," he said, pleasantly, "I hope you have taken your full stare at those fashionable cousins of yours, and that you will have eyes for something else next Sunday."

Mattie laughed; but she thought it very disagreeable of Mr. Hamilton to make such a remark.

It cannot be said that the Misses Lawson were as favourably impressed by what they saw as Mattie had been by them.

"I see now that we shall simply die of this place," said Katie, the elder sister. "I suppose all the people were in church; and as far as I could see, there was not one there that looked fit to speak to."

"A museum of old-fashioned curiosities, I should call the place," answered her sister Anna.

Oh! if Mattie had but heard her cousins.

Poor old Sir Henry toiled along beside them in silence. Whatever he may have thought, speech was very difficult to him; and the thoughts, words, and deeds of his foolish daughters had long passed out of his control.

"I just know how it is," whispered Katie in a low tone. "We shall be moped to death here. Papa will think himself all right, getting along in

his bath-chair, and sniffing in the iodine, or whatever the name of that thing is that people always think they are swallowing at the sea-side. Give him his iodine and his newspaper, and he cares for nothing else. But what on earth will become of us, Anna, hidden away in this dull corner?"

"Katie, I say, when we go in, let us have up old Mrs. Fussy, and find out from her what the inhabitants of the land are accustomed to do with themselves."

Mrs. "Fussy," as they called her, was likely to be a good authority. She was Mrs. Fosberry, who, for the last forty years, had been letting lodgings in Buckering.

"Now, Mrs. Fosberry, sit down. We want to ask you yards and miles of questions," said Anna, pushing a chair in the direction of the old lady when she appeared in answer to their summons.

Mrs. Fosberry entered with a firm step, strong in the consciousness of being arrayed in her best Sunday black silk. She smiled, took her seat, and looked expectantly at Anna.

"I must have the first question," said Katie. "Now, do tell me, Mrs. Fosberry, who was that girl with the round red cheeks and apple-green bonnet that sat close by us, and stared all through the service?"

"Round red cheeks—apple-green bonnet?" repeated Mrs. Fosberry meditatively. "Well, really now, miss, I couldn't say. I know nobody—unless, indeed, it could be Miss Mattie."

"Miss Mattie!" shrieked Anna. "What a name!"

"That is Miss Wilson, I mean—Squire Wilson's daughter," continued Mrs. Fosberry, correcting herself. "She is stout, certainly, I consider, and she has a fine colour." Mrs. Fosberry was very loyal-hearted to old friends, and at this point a certain reserve stole over her manner.

"Wilson, Katie!" cried Anna; "that is the very name that father—"

"Hush! never mind! Let me see what next," went on Katie with a meaning glance at her sister.—"Mrs. Fosberry, I should think you so very kind if you would only tell us, what can people do here to amuse themselves?"

This question thoroughly amazed Mrs. Fosberry. The idea of any one finding the resources of Bucker-
ing insufficient to their wants was beyond her comprehension. "Do, miss?" she answered. "Well, I think it enough, after my day's work, only to look out at the beautiful sea, and the gentlemen's yachts going by."

"I should rather be in them than looking at them, for my part," answered Anna.

"Then, for idle folk," continued Mrs. Fosberry, unheeding the interruption, "there are riding, and walking, and bathing, and boating."

"Boating!" repeated Katie. "Ha! that might not be so bad; but I do not see any boats. Where are the boats, my good woman?"

"There, miss, just before your eyes on the beach. Four of them. Do you not see? They all belong to one man, and he hires them out by the hour. I know the names of them all. There are the *Sarah Jane* and the *Sweetheart*—"

"Never mind the names, Mrs. Fosberry," said Katie, eying the boats with a dissatisfied air. "I do not want lumbering old things like these. Is there nothing to be had here that we could row about by ourselves?"

Mrs. Fosberry shook her head. "John Turner's boats are all large," she said. "They are mostly used for big parties, and picnics, and such like."

"Are you sure there is nothing else?"

"Quite sure, miss; except it may be Squire Wilson's new boat. You may say she is a tiny thing, as light as a feather. But, of course, you could not have that; it is a present the squire is going to make to his son Master James."

"Where is she?" inquired Anna, with sudden interest.

"Locked up in the squire's boat-house. My boy Andy, he works with the squire, do you see, and he has the charge of her. That's how I know."

"Thank you; that will do, Mrs. Fosberry," said Katie, turning discontentedly away.

"You may be certain 'Miss Mattie' is one of the Wilsons that papa said were some sort of relations of ours," observed Anna, as soon as Mrs. Fosberry had left the room. "She will be sure to call, and we might ask her to lend us the boat."

"We might not do anything of the kind, Anna; I am surprised at you," returned Katie snappishly.

Mattie was one of the very first people in Bucker-
ing to call on the new arrivals. Impelled by a
sense of the importance of her mission, she was to
be seen on Monday afternoon standing in the sun-
shine at the door of Mrs. Fosberry's lodgings,
nervously grasping in both hands her mother's
silver card-case.

Anna was thundering through a brilliant piece
on the piano, and Katie lay with closed eyes upon
the sofa, as Mattie, escorted by Mrs. Fosberry,
reached the door of the sitting-room. The music
suddenly ceased as Anna got sight of that apple-
green bonnet, shading those rosy cheeks; and with
the cessation of the noise, Katie opened her eyes.

Mattie felt it to be a very overwhelming moment.

But she held on tight to her card-case, and tried desperately to remember what was the opening speech she had composed for the occasion. The Misses Lawson, however, were not in the least put about. Katie rose slowly from the sofa ; and they both made graceful bows towards their visitor in the most approved dancing-school fashion. Mattie returned the bow, not quite so gracefully ; fumbled with the clasp of her card-case ; finally opened it, and drew forth one of her mother's cards.

"My mamma asked me to call," she said, timidly extending the card towards Katie, "as she had to leave home herself." And having got through so much, the rosy hue on her cheeks deepened by at least two shades.

"Oh!" answered Katie, mechanically taking the card, and reading the name upon it ; "pray, sit down."

Mattie sat down hurriedly on the edge of a chair, and for a little was conscious of what seemed to her an unendurable and interminable pause. The silence really did not last a minute. Katie and Anna were too much accustomed to visitors at home, and too glad to hail one in their isolation at Buckering, to make any difficulty at conversation.

They made themselves quite agreeable : "Were

so sorry Mrs. Wilson had been obliged to leave home; were *so* much obliged to Mattie for calling; were certain Mattie must be the cousin of whom their father had told them; were *so* glad to make her acquaintance; and hoped on a very early day to return her kind visit at Sea Field."

Mattie was enchanted. Her shyness disappeared; her tongue became active; and the Lawsons, plying her with questions, found out, in a few minutes, more about Buckering, its resources and its people, than they had been able to extract from poor old Mrs. Fosberry in double the time.

The semi-confidential tone of this conversation greatly added to the charm. "What nice girls!" thought Mattie, as she rose to take leave; "so pleasant and cousin-like! They evidently like me as much as I like them." And Mattie descended the narrow staircase with buoyant step and beaming face.

"Did you ever!" said Anna, turning up her eyes in derision, as the door closed on Mattie's retreating figure. "And she is determined to be our cousin too!"

"Oh, well, she is not so bad!" said Katie condescendingly. "She was evidently frightened."

"She never offered to lend us the boat, for all that," observed Anna.

"We'll make her lend it before long," returned Katie, quite conscious of the favourable impression she had made upon her visitor.

Mattie met Ruth and Mr. Hamilton coming in to pay their visit as she passed out.

"You are very lucky; they are at home," she said excitedly. "Such pleasant, nice girls! We are quite like relations already."

"Indeed! that is quick work," said Mr. Hamilton.

"Did they call you Mattie?" asked Ruth, with interest.

"No," answered Mattie; "but, of course, they soon will."

When the Lawsons shortly afterwards paid their return visit at Sea Field, it chanced that Ruth Hamilton was there also. Mattie scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry about this. She longed to show off the pleasant terms she was on with them before her old companion; and yet, for some reason, she felt a little dread of Ruth's steady, observant eyes and of her terribly downright tongue. However, all went well; and, to her intense delight, Mattie heard Katie, unsolicited, and in Ruth's hearing, call her by her Christian name in the most cousinly way possible.

After this the four girls had a walk round the grounds to see the views.

"I should call it quite the prettiest place I have seen here," said Katie, looking down upon the little quiet harbour, where one or two fishing-boats lay at anchor.

"I never look at the sea without wishing to be in it or on it," cried Anna impetuously.

Here they turned a corner, and found themselves opposite the boat-house.

"If you want to see a boat in perfection, look in there," said Ruth, pointing to the broad gate which formed the front of the boat-house.

"A boat! I love a boat. Let me see!" cried Anna.

The girls' faces were soon pressed against the bars.

"What a darling!" cried Anna, peering in; "just the thing we want. Why, Katie, you and I could easily row her about by ourselves."

"There is not much chance you ever will," said Ruth composedly, with a nod of her head towards Anna. "That boat is not to be touched by man, woman, or child, till Mattie's brother Jem comes home. Mrs. Wilson told me so herself."

"A very stupid arrangement, I should say," said Katie, giving the closed padlock that hung on the gate an impatient shake as she turned away.

Mattie did not hear; she was busy trying to secure a beautiful spray of wild roses, that had

climbed one side of the boat-house, for presentation to her guests.

The visit terminated soon after this. Katie and Anna returned to Buckering, and Ruth remained on at Sea Field with her friend.

"Stupid little thing that Ruth Hamilton is, staring at one with her owl's eyes whenever one opens their lips!" said Katie, crossly, to her sister. "Only for her being there, I would have asked Mattie to lend me the boat; but I knew she would have put her against it."

From this time forward the intimacy between Mattie and Sir Henry Lawson's daughters grew closer every day. "A stroll to Sea Field" was, as they declared, a pleasant object for a walk; and Mattie's respectful devotion to them was an amusement better than nothing. Accordingly they made much of Mattie.

"I am sure I wish your brother Jem would come home. It would be a satisfaction for once to see that white boat on the water," said Katie one day, as the three girls sat together on the slope outside the boat-house, throwing stones into the sea.

"There is no use wishing for that, I fear," answered Mattie, shaking her head. "Jem will not come till long after you have left this."

"Mattie, did you promise your mother not to

use the boat?" asked Anna earnestly, raising herself on her elbow, and looking at Mattie.

"No, I did not exactly promise," began Mattie.

"Oh, Anna, do leave that boat question alone. It is evident Mattie does not want to be obliging about it," said Katie crossly. "Come, it is time for us to be getting home."

"How unfortunate it is that they are always wanting that boat! Now I see they are quite angry," thought Mattie, as she rose from her seat upon the bank, feeling supremely uncomfortable.

For nearly a week after this the Lawsons did not go near Sea Field. They were getting tired of Mattie; and since she did not seem disposed to permit the launching of the boat, they thought there was very little more in the way of amusement to be got from her. Mattie felt very sore about it; though she would not admit to any one that there was the least cause for annoyance or the least cooling of friendship.

Sunday afternoon came round again. The Lawsons had taken no notice of Mattie after church that morning further than a stiff bow as they turned away to their lodgings; and Mattie now, rather disgusted with things in general, was sitting alone in the drawing-room at Sea Field, thinking drearily that it was time to dress to go to Mr. Hamilton's after-

noon Scripture class, when she heard a ring at the hall door, and in a moment afterwards Anna Lawson was ushered into the room.

Mattie started. This was indeed an unexpected visit. Anna herself looked rather flurried too.

"Mattie," she said abruptly, dropping herself into a chair, and unfastening her bonnet-strings, "I have come to put your friendship to the test. That little Ruth Hamilton is most annoying. We were talking of the boat, when Ruth said you never would or should lend it to us, and that she would advise you not, and that you always did as she advised. And I said those times were past, and that you had too much sense, now that you knew other people, to be guided by an ignorant little thing like her. And now, Mattie," cried Anna, excitedly grasping her by the wrist, "you must take our side. You must lend us the boat, and prove that you have the spirit to choose your own friends."

Mattie turned quite pale from the intensity of the struggle within her breast. How the Hamiltons would laugh at her broken friendship, her vaunted cousinship, and her proposed visit to London! "No," thought she, "I cannot bear the Lawsons to think that I am so much under Ruth's influence as all that, especially as they always say I am too clever not to know my own mind."

"Yes, Anna," she said aloud, "you are right—I do not care a pin for Ruth. I know my friends. Take the boat for this once, if you like; but don't tell any one."

"All right!" answered Anna, sunshine on her face again; "I knew your friendship might be depended on."

"Oh, if mother hears of it!" said poor Mattie, with a pang: deception was new and painful work.

"She need never hear of it; we are not so stupid as all that," said Anna, her evil counsellor.

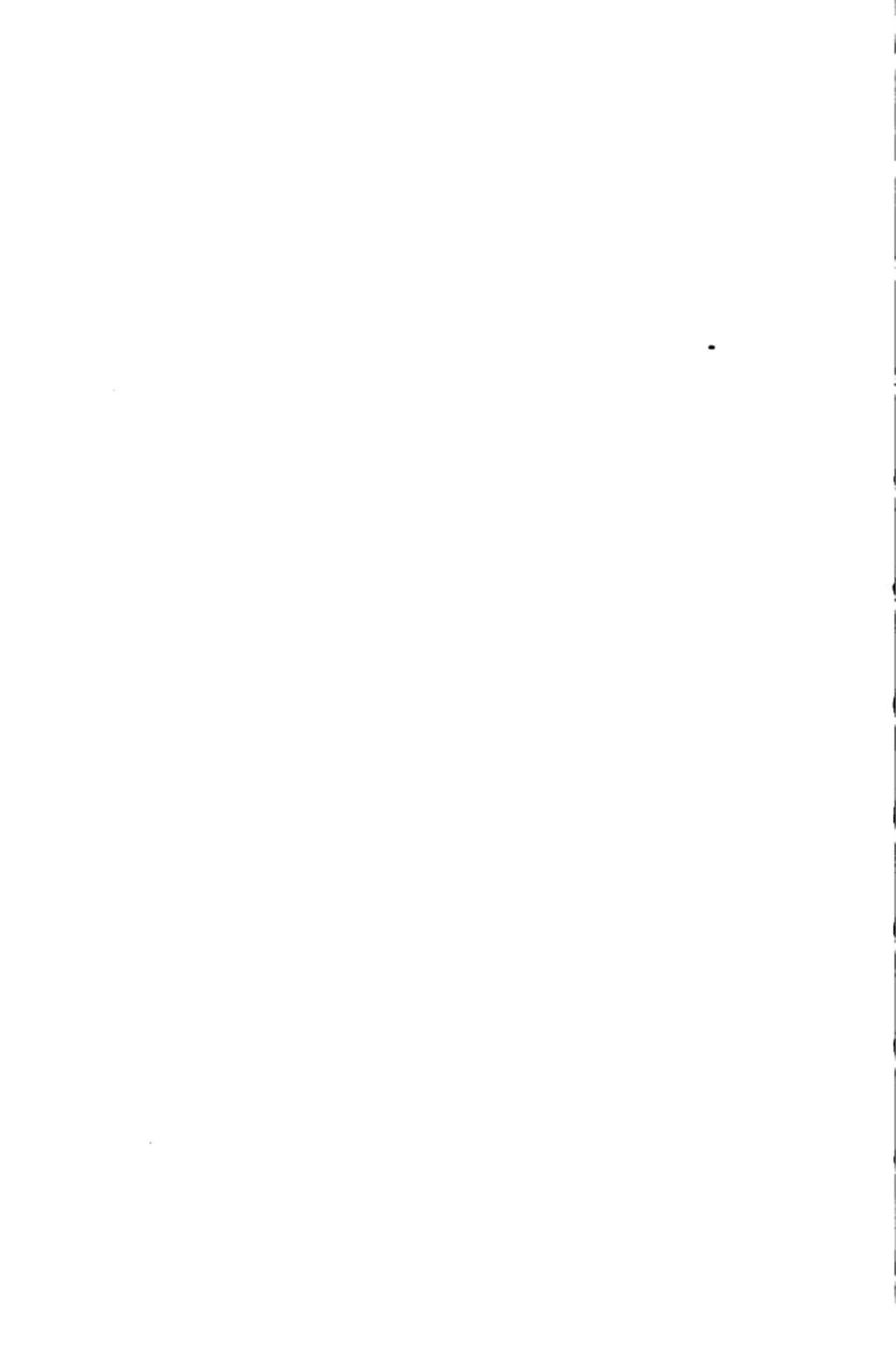
"But who could launch her?" said Mattie, with a ray of hope that she had found a difficulty for which she could not be held responsible.

"That is all settled," returned Anna. "Your boy Andy, Mrs. Fosberry's son, says he could easily get another boy to help, and carry her down the slip in five minutes. Now, there is a darling. Give me the key of the boat-house, and ask no questions; that is all I want."

Mattie quite succumbed before the evidence of arrangement shown in this attack. She did not like to give the key. She hated to give it. And yet she gave it. How was this? It was because she overmuch feared the ridicule or displeasure of her new friends, and overmuch believed and loved their subtle flatteries. She was snared.



ANNA AND MATTIE. *Page 22.*



That afternoon, as Mattie made her way to the Scripture class, a small white boat, rowed by two young ladies, was to be seen dancing along upon the rippling waters of the little harbour at Buckering.

"I wonder Sir Henry Lawson would be for allowing his daughters to spend their Sunday afternoon in that fashion," said some who observed them. "I don't know the boat. She is a new one, I take it, they've got down from London."

"From all I hear," said another observer, "it is not much Sir Henry can hinder them from doing."

Mattie might have seen them from the road as she walked to the class. But she kept her eyes turned the other way.

During class-time she was sad and abstracted. Holding her Bible open on her knee, she was yet scarcely aware of what was going on around her.

"Well, Mattie, perhaps you could tell me," were the words that fell on her ear as she woke up from a reverie.

Mattie started. Mr. Hamilton stood opposite to her, Bible in hand. It was evident, from the suppressed mirth around her, that he had already been asking her some question of which her wandering mind was unaware.

He saw her confusion. "Rather in the clouds to-day, Mattie, eh?" he said pleasantly. "We have been speaking of the words, '*The fear of man bringeth a snare*,' in the twenty-ninth chapter of Proverbs; and I want to know if you see any other verse in that chapter that speaks of a snare."

Mattie made a show of glancing up and down the page, but she was too much startled and confused to give an intelligible answer.

"Read the fifth verse," said Mr. Hamilton.

"*A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet*," read Mattie in a low tone.

"That is it," said Mr. Hamilton. "Remember that flattery is one of the commonest and most easily laid snares of all."

Mattie fancied he looked at her as he spoke; and feeling a dread of any conversation, she hurried away when the class broke up, merely giving a nod to Ruth as she passed her.

Mattie was fast in the net now. She made no more struggles. The boat was used by her reckless young friends as often as they liked, and was knocked about just as it suited their convenience, for but little real care had they for Mattie's feelings. They "had the key;" and Mattie, according to arrangement, asked no questions. Katie and Anna expected to leave Buckering before Mrs. Wilson

came home, and they cared very little indeed about what happened to Mattie after their departure.

Mattie was silly enough to believe no one would take any notice of the frequent appearance of the little boat on the water. "People will think it belongs to the Lawsons, and there is really no one to tell father; unless indeed Andy, and I am sure he won't." This last thought gave Mattie rather a shock. Had she then put herself in the power of the garden-boy?

Mr. Hamilton knew all about what was going forward; but he said nothing, nor did he alter his kindness of manner to Mattie. He knew her friendship with the Lawsons had no continuance in it, and thought she would learn a more useful lesson than he could tell her in words, by leaving her own acts to work out their result.

One evening, little knowing it, Katie and Anna took their last row in the *Pearl*. Their father's health obliged them to return unexpectedly to London. They sent a message by Andy to Mattie, informing her of the fact, and before Mattie could realize it, they were miles upon their way.

Her friends were gone. She had sacrificed a good deal for them. Yet now, as she stood there thinking of it, it seemed as if their coming and going must have been alike a dream.

The day hung heavily on her hands. She could not settle herself to anything. She would have been glad of a visit even from Ruth. But Ruth did not offer to come to Sea Field now, as she had often done in days gone by; and Mattie felt some awkwardness in going to seek her out.

There were, however, arrivals as well as departures on this eventful day. To Mattie's immense surprise, her father and mother returned home unexpectedly that evening. Moreover, it was a sort of double surprise, for they brought Jem with them.

Mattie's joy was sincere at the sight of their loved and familiar faces. Sea Field was like itself again, as she listened to their voices and saw them moving through the rooms. And yet, even as she went hand in hand with her school-boy brother through the house, there was a shadow over her joy, a note out of tune in her song.

Jem's holidays had begun earlier than usual in consequence of illness having broken out in the school; and his parents, on hearing it, hurried home along with him, that he might enjoy himself the more.

"School-boys must keep their birthdays when they can, you know, Mattie. I propose that Jeni's birthday be to-morrow," said Mr. Wilson to his

daughter, with a confidential nod across the tea-table.

Mattie smiled spasmodically in return. She was certain her father was thinking of the *Pearl*.

"I believe a certain very important key was left in your possession, Miss Mattie," he continued.

Mattie began to cough violently. She said a crumb of bread had "gone the wrong way." The key! the key! who had it? Could the Lawsons have carried it away to London?

"Miss Mattie, you are wanted, if you please, miss," said the housemaid, entering the room.

"You see, Mattie, you are not yet relieved from your household cares," said her mother, smiling, as she heard the summons.

Mattie returned to the drawing-room looking much relieved. It was Andy who had called, to return the boat-house key "into Miss Mattie's own hands," according to instructions. "So far so well," thought Mattie. "I do not think they will ever know I allowed the boat to be used."

But it was not "well" much further. It was not exactly "well" the next morning when Mr. Wilson, declaring it must be his son's birthday, took Jem with him to the boat-house to present him with the *Pearl*.

Mrs. Wilson went too, full of satisfaction at

having provided such a pleasure for her son ; and Mattie went, because she felt she was expected to do so, though she actually dreaded to look at the boat in her father's presence, lest he might detect some blemish inflicted on her in some of her secret voyages.

Jem's enthusiasm, however, over this unexpected offering of a treasure he had so long coveted, hindered Mr. Wilson from finding fault with anything. Everything seemed right since Jem was pleased.

"There she is, my boy!" cried his father, "made specially for you. No one has been allowed to lay a finger on her until you yourself could be present at her launch. Here she has been locked up waiting for you to release her. Mattie has been a very jealous jailer. Have you not, Mattie?"

"Yes," answered Mattie with a noisy laugh; "yes, yes, oh yes!" "So far so well," again thought Mattie, as the little party left the boat-house happily together.

Mr. Wilson discussed, as he went along, arrangements for the launch of the little *Pearl* on the following afternoon.

"I am sorry the Lawson girls are gone," said Mrs. Wilson. "But I dare say Ruth and her father would come."

"Do you know," said Mr. Wilson to his wife that



MATTIE'S CONFESSION.

Page 30.



afternoon, when they were alone together, "I am rather vexed with Andy. I am certain that boat has been used; I have just now been looking at her carefully. There are stains on the paint here and there, and I can distinctly trace a footmark on the inside, where probably the paint was not quite dry."

"How very strange!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson. "I cannot understand it. How could any one get at the boat when Mattie had the key? I must ask her if she knows anything of it."

"Oh no!" answered Mr. Wilson. "Of course she would have told us if so. No; I suspect Andy has been lending her to some of his friends. His manner was surly, too, when I noticed the stains. All I can say is, if I find he has been meddling with my property in that underhand manner, he shall leave my service to-morrow."

But Mr. Wilson's anger against Andy was all evaporated when he next saw his wife. In the interval he had learned a very bitter truth. He had learned that his daughter Mattie, on whose goodness and truth he had always relied without question, had deceived and disobeyed him. It was a trifle, indeed, whether the paint on the *Pearl* were dirty or clean; but it was not by any means a trifle that Mattie could be guilty of deception.

Andy, finding his own character at stake, quickly forgot his vows of secrecy, and told the truth about his young mistress in very natural self-defence.

Mattie had to confess now. But her confession had no grace in it, and her parents were deeply disappointed and grieved.

Meantime, once Katie and Anna turned their backs on Buckering, they thought but little more of Mattie or the boat. Other scenes and people occupied their minds, and they never so much as once wrote back or renewed the coveted invitation to London. The fear of losing her friends' favour had been Mattie's snare. Now she was in the snare, and had lost their favour as well. The net in which Mattie's feet had been entangled was the net of their worthless flattery.





